



2nd September 2008

Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

To The Secretary,

Re: Federal Inquiry into the current system of Natural Resource Management, including the capacity of regional NRM groups and how NHT and NAP have functioned.

Who we are:

The Weed Management Society of South Australia (WMSSA) is the independent state body representing weed managers, researchers, students and community groups on weed-related issues. The WMSSA has an executive consisting of members of universities, State government departments, local government, community bodies and interested volunteers. The aim of the WMSSA is to minimise the economic, environmental and social impacts of weeds in South Australia. The next major WMSSA event will be the 1st South Australian Weeds Conference on Oct 2nd and 3rd 2008, Adelaide University at which over 150 delegates from all SA regions are expected to attend.

The WMSSA is a member of the Council of Australasian Weed Societies (CAWS), which is the trans-national, umbrella organisation for Weed Societies from every Australian State and New Zealand. CAWS members are at the front line in the battle against weeds – as farmers, noxious weeds officers, volunteer groups (e.g. “Friends of” parks, Landcare, Bushcare, Coastcare), researchers, advisers and rangers. The primary function of the WMSSA and other CAWS member societies is to raise awareness of the impacts of weeds and to provide opportunities to promote policy and technical advances in their management. The next major event for CAWS is the 17th Australasian Weeds Conference in New Zealand in September 2010, with over 500 delegates expected to attend.

The invasive plant problem in Australia:

Weeds are widely recognised as one of Australia’s most pressing natural resource management issues. Indeed, farmers have recently ranked weeds as their greatest national NRM problem. Internationally, invasive species are one of the top threats to biodiversity (along with land clearing and climate change). Aside from extensive economic and environmental costs, weeds

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also pose substantial social costs in Australia. These include health risks through toxins in livestock products and allergenic pollens, loss of access and amenity in national parks and waterways, and increased fire risks in peri-urban areas from dense thickets of invasive grasses and shrubs. The major social impact of weeds is the time-demanding nature of weed control – a loss of productive and recreational time borne by many Australians. Unless governments co-invest with landholders in strategic control programs and the development of new and improved control techniques, the economic, environmental and social impacts of weeds in Australia will continue to expand.

The current cost of weeds to Australian cropping, pastoral and native ecosystems has been conservatively estimated at 4 billion dollars per annum. The WMSSA supports any Federal or State Government or NRM Regional strategies that aid the research and management of Australia's weed problems, including those related to increased long term strategic planning within and across all NRM regions and across State borders. The WMSSA supports the \$15.3 million weed initiative announced in the last Federal Budget by Minister Tony Bourke. We would like to emphasise, however, that it is imperative that these federal funds are distributed equitably across Australian States and NRM Regions, ensuring that weed problems in South Australia are given as much priority as in the more highly populated eastern states. Indeed, the costly problem of invasive plants and animals in the wilderness of this country was noted recently on page three of *The Age* (27/8/08) in two articles describing the release of a scientific study into the last great wild places on earth: 'Outback ranks highly in the world wild web', and an article regarding rate of spread of the cane toad across the country, 'Melbourne's cool reception to stop the cane toad's hop'. These high costs to Australia's natural environment are difficult to quantify and are the reason, along with thousands of hours of volunteer time, that the above cost estimate is so conservative. In addition, research has shown that changing climatic conditions will alter the distribution of many weeds in Australia. In most cases this means that the agricultural sector will incur significant additional costs associated with managing weeds. *The WMSSA supports a national strategy to deal with weeds, drought and changing climatic conditions in Australia.*

The invasive plant problem in South Australia:

Currently in South Australian agricultural regions, 95% of our cropping farmers have herbicide resistant weeds on their land. This means that, across vast stretches of this state, existing herbicides will no longer kill the weed species that are most costly to agriculture. These costs of producing food are of course passed onto consumers. Invasive plants in Australia's native ecosystems rapidly devastate areas of our natural biodiversity. Weeds simply grow faster than, and smother, entire native plant communities. South Australia currently has large-scale infestations of bridal creeper, arguably southern Australia's worst environmental weed. No other plant species can grow across the large areas of land where this plant produces continuous mats of tubers in the soil. No environmental weeds in South Australia have yet spread to all the areas that are climatically suitable for their growth. However, they all spread easily and are degrading once diverse areas of vegetation in this state.

South Australia already has some of Australia's worst weeds, and weeds are not confined by regional or state borders. Invasive plants in Australia are only naturally limited by the areas that are suitable for their growth. In most cases these areas are as large as most of temperate southern Australia, or northern tropical Australia. It is imperative for the future safeguarding of South Australia's productive and natural ecosystems that invasive plants are limited in their spread by increases in knowledge, technology and forward planning of management activities across all NRM regions. This includes the identification and prevention of new and equally

devastating weed problems. *The WMSSA is therefore calling for increased long term strategic planning and funding of weed management activities across NRM regions.* A fine example of Australia-wide planning are the boneseed and gorse (both woody bush-type weeds) 'containment lines' which have been formed across the country by the respective WoNs (Weeds of National Significance) coordinators for each weed.

Action at the Federal and State levels:

Unfortunately there is limited research into invasive plants in South Australia, a problem which requires urgent attention by the South Australian State Government. Currently, South Australia relies on weed research and management outcomes from across Australia to add to its own findings for managing weeds. *Regardless of where the research actually occurs, it is essential that federal monies are used for a range of projects that are equitably relevant to all States and NRM regions across the country.* The Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon. Tony Bourke has recently announced a new 15.3 million dollar national weed research initiative. *It is imperative that these federal funds are augmented by State governments and local stakeholders to ensure that adequate research can be done into the weed problems that are most devastating to SA agriculture and natural ecosystems. It is also vital that effective channels are established for effectively distributing the latest weed research to the NRM regions where it is needed.*

All NRM and CMA regions need to be fed the latest weed research information in order to actively devise their regionally specific weed control programs. This means that weed research in Australia needs to be effectively continued over the long term and well coordinated in terms of research needs. The WMSSA would like to ensure that new weed strategies and programs retain the features of the recent Weeds CRC model that made it so successful. These include:

- truly national research collaboration of all State Departments, Universities and CSIRO, providing in-kind FTE investment;
- cash investment from various research and development corporations (e.g. GRDC);
- an independent, representative board determining research directions and delivery mechanisms;
- weed species targeted for both northern and southern Australia;
- a substantial budget proportion focused on delivery of management information to landholders;
- quality factsheets, technical publications and website;
- training of post-graduate students in weed management;
- post-doctoral research positions supervised by Australia's leading weed scientists; and
- research coverage across the weed management spectrum (prevention, detection, eradication, containment and integrated management).

As well as the Weeds CRC, the Weeds of National Significance (WoNS) and other related initiatives under the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) and Defeating the Weeds Menace (DWM) have allowed significant national advances in reducing current and future impacts of a wide range of weed species. The WoNS program has been highly beneficial not only in funding research, extension and coordination against twenty of Australia's worst weeds, but also in demonstrating the benefits of a strategic approach to managing weeds at national, regional and local levels. The WMSSA is concerned that the DWM program finished in June 2008 and would like to see a similar funding program continue, with national, regional and research components.

Action at the NRM level:

Weed control needs to occur consistently over many years in order to be effective. Indeed, if a patch of gorse, for example, is sprayed one year and then left to regrow in subsequent years due to a lack of funds for labour costs, this not only exacerbates the weed problem but disheartens hardworking land managers. The WMSSA has recently written to all eight SA NRM regions emphasising the point that *“on-ground weed control works in all NRM regions require significant and separate committed budgets in order to be effective in the long term. All NRM regions need to incorporate specific long term targets for weed management into their strategic plans.”* The WMSSA has been pleased to note that this has been done by the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges NRM Board which is the one NRM region in SA that has completed its strategic planning process.

The WMSSA hopes that this submission will assist efforts to effectively research and manage existing and future weed problems in Australia.

Yours sincerely,

Rachel Melland
President, Weed Management Society of South Australia